

New book on Oswald adds to confusion surrounding the Kennedy assassination

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Edward Jay Epstein, "Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald." New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1978. Distributed by McGraw-Hill.

By DAVID R. WRONE

The latest addition to the voluminous library of assassination literature, already heavily laden with the sycophantic and the speculative, "Legend" trumps them all as the most irresponsible and perhaps the most vicious.

Spectacularly financed by "Reader's Digest" and with the heavy ideological imprimatur of the ousted ultra-right wing Angleton faction of the CIA, it is carefully written to confuse all but the most informed of readers.

Epstein's work is touted as resting on documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act and as showing his expertise in pressing the CIA with 44 questions they would not answer. Because Epstein uses documents the CIA is currently denying critics who are in the second year of a terrific court battle, the FOIA appears to be a device for overt CIA leaking to Epstein.

The parried questions appear to be a cover for Epstein's inability to speak with authority in the area of the questions. The whole basis of the questions is not to get answers, for the FOIA is limited to the existence of records considered to be public and excludes record generation, such as factual re-

sponses to questions.

Starting with a presumption of Oswald's guilt,

Epstein's main purpose is to pound this false doctrine into the public mind. He explains that Oswald was a KGB agent whose identity was masked by the fake story given by the "defector" Yuri Nosenko, a KGB plant.

George De Mohrenschildt was supposedly Oswald's KGB spy master. The narrative contains little substance, most of which is a perversion of the evidence or misleading.

Epstein argues that Oswald was converted by Communists while he was stationed in Japan and in October, 1959 fled to Russia with knowledge of the flying altitude of the U-2. This knowledge (although the Soviets already had launched a Sputnik) gave Russia the ability to shoot down Gary Powers' spy plane.

That Oswald, a mere radar operator, would have specific knowledge of the altitude flown by the U-2 is pure speculation on Epstein's part. Leonard Mosely, in his new biography of the Dulles family, states that the Soviets had the knowledge in 1958.

Epstein deceives when he states Oswald left



Lee Harvey Oswald

England on October 9 and arrived in Finland on October 10. The passport stamps show that he left England on October 10 and arrived in Finland the same day, which the Warren Commission found was an impossibility by commercial flight. The only apparent alternative mode of flight was by U.S. military plane, its use being quite unusual for a defector, but quite routine for a U.S. intelligence agent going on a mission.

The reader is not told that the FBI considered Nosenko's story of the Soviets viewing Oswald as an "American sleeper agent" to be sound and offered to place Nosenko on the witness stand to testify under oath. Penalties could be imposed if he lied. The commission refused.

Too, Epstein deceives in recounting the commission's handling of the knowledge of Nosenko. He has deputy CIA director Richard Helms meeting with Chief Justice Earl Warren at noon on June 24, and Warren then calling a commission meeting for the evening. In fact, the commission met June 23 to discuss the issue, and Helms requested and met with Warren on June 24.

Epstein obfuscates the possibility the CIA applied pressure on the Warren Commission to back away from investigating Oswald's link with United States intelligence.

Epstein provides nothing substantive on De Mohrenschildt that would connect him to a sinister plot. He documents only that De Mohrenschildt, several weeks before the assassination, befriended a family fleeing Russia. Twice in recent years an inmate of mental hospitals, De Mohrenschildt was constantly hounded by exploiters of the assassination.

After Epstein pushed in for an interview, De Mohrenschildt finally lost contact with reality and killed himself.

Facts that becloud this devil theory of history are hidden. For example, when Epstein depicts Teofil Meller's relationship with Oswald, he omits she had gone to the FBI about Oswald's possible radicalism and had been told by the FBI that Oswald was all right.

In New Orleans, Epstein states, Oswald rented a room at 544 Camp, a corner building abutting Lafayette. No record supports this statement; the owner of the building denies it. Epstein attempts to hide a major problem: Oswald's pre-Castro literature was stamped 544 Camp, but this address was the headquarters of an anti-Castro group. 531 Lafayette, the same building, held CIA offices and was across the park from Oswald's post office box.

Appendix A purports to master the evidence proving Oswald shot President Kennedy. It is unparalleled in the literature for its gross disinformation and errors of fact.

For example, Epstein denies the Warren Commission's conclusion (held by almost all critics and supporters) that the oak tree on Elm Street blocked any shot from the alleged sniper's lair before frame 219 on the Zapruder film of the assassination. He claims it was bare of leaves in November. Scores of contemporary photographs show the oak tree in full leaf.

During a period when the assassination of President Kennedy is being investigated by Congress, "Legend" will be a major source of confusion and turn the attention of the American people away from the cover-up coeval with the framing of Lee Harvey Oswald.

Where "Legend" departs from fact

Representative instances of the errors of fact and distortion of evidence found within the text and notes of "Legend":

1. Epstein falsely claims he obtained the Jan. 27, 1964, Warren Commission transcript under a Freedom of Information suit, but the transcript was obtained by Harold Weisberg and Jim Lesar in FOIA suit C.A. 2032-73. (The subject of an article in The Capital Times, Dec. 1, 1975).

2. Epstein states Oswald mutilated a photograph of a car parked near General Walker's home, but Warren Commission testimony conclusively shows the print came into federal possession in good condition and was mutilated only after it had been shown to Marina Oswald.

3. Epstein states that until 1976 it was a secret that Oswald refused to take a lie detector test when he returned from Russia, but Oswald told the Dallas police of his refusal when he was interrogated in 1963.

4. Epstein states the bullet dug from General Walker's wall could not be identified, but the bullet was immediately identified and found to be a 30.06 and steel jacketed.

5. The Penkovsky Papers did not contain information on Soviet intelligence activities useful to U.S. operations, but was proven to be a CIA black book, a forgery by the CIA to disinform the American people.

6. To refer to the Jones Printing Co. as "downtown" New Orleans is poor orientation for the city as the plant was 45 feet from Oswald's job in the coffee factory.

7. Epstein neglects to inform the reader that the FBI and Secret Service had their cars serviced at the Alba garage where Oswald hung out.

8. Epstein does not tell that Oswald's post office box was in the Lafayette substation within a federal office building where it shared a common lobby with other agencies but had a separate door. The building housed U.S. intelligence agencies; such an arrangement would be a convenient way to communicate and pass information.

9. Epstein's statement that Oswald walked into the Texas School Book Depository with a package under his arm ignores the testimony of book wrapper Dougherty who testified that he was positive that Oswald came through the door empty-handed.

10. Epstein ignores the conflicts and irrationality of taxi driver Whaley's testimony and selects information that fits when he states that the taxi dropped Oswald a block from his rooming house. Whaley also testified Oswald was dropped at the corner of two streets that ran parallel as well as yet another address.

11. Epstein places Oswald on the sixth floor of the Depository during the lunch hour, based on the testimony of Charles Givens, presumably, the key witness. But Givens originally swore Oswald was on the second floor. The evidence of subornation of perjury that exists cannot be ignored.

12. Epstein states that the murderer of Police Officer J.D. Tippitt wore a gray jacket, but witnesses said white, blue, black, tan, brown and other colors. The evidence is inconclusive.

13. Epstein excludes from his treatment of Mrs. Markham's eyewitness testimony on the murder of Tippitt statements that impeach her credibility.

— WRONE



Richard Helms